

Local mountain lion sighting

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Could there be a mountain lion roaming the woods off Keene Street in Duxbury?

According to Duxbury town manager Richard MacDonald, last week a person saw a "very large animal" in the Keene Street area and later, investigation of the footprints has led officials to believe the animal could be a mountain lion.

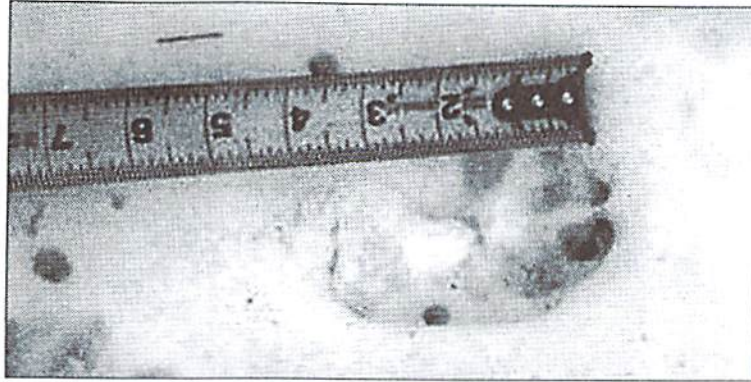
Department of Public Works Director Peter Buttkus said the witness was a carpenter working on a job in the Northwest corner of Duxbury and he watched the cougar walk along a fence line. The witness estimated the big cat to be six to six and a half feet long.

Mountain lions, also known as cougars, pumas or catamounts, are large, brownish cats that generally weigh between 100 and 200 pounds. They are found mostly out West and in parts of southern Florida but hundreds of years ago they lived in all of North America. They were believed to be killed to extinction in New England in the 1800s. Since then, there have been various cougar sightings throughout all of the Eastern states and New York and Pennsylvania. In 1848, in Rhode Island, the last documented mountain lion was killed in West Greenwich. Its remains reside at Harvard University's Museum of Comparative Zoology.

MacDonald said that when the witness was shown photographs of various animals, he identified the picture of the mountain lion as the animal he saw.

"There are footprints that seem to verify that they are from a mountain lion," said MacDonald.

Photographs have been



These tracks, found in the northwest corner of Duxbury near Keene Street, seem to show a mountain lion was on the prowl.

taken of the footprints and sent to the state Division of Wildlife and the town is waiting to hear more information, Buttkus said.

The pictures show paw prints in the snow and alongside a measuring tape showing the prints to be a little over 4" in diameter, said Buttkus.

MacDonald urged the public to be careful and said the town has sent out a reverse-911 announcement about the possible sighting to residents in the Keene Street area.

Buttkus said the location of the cougar sighting is a very large rural area along Duxbury's border with Pembroke and Marshfield. Duxbury officials are working with the Pembroke animal control officer and they have installed game cameras near the sighting area in the hopes of capturing the big cat on film.

According to Buttkus, the Pembroke ACO officer's wife is a taxidermist who believes from seeing the footprints that the animal is a mountain lion, and she estimated it to be between 70 to 100 lbs.

While Buttkus wants the public to be aware, he doesn't want the situation to become "a circus."

"These animals try to avoid people. They are shy and solitary and have a very large ter-

ritory. They can roam up to a 30-square mile area," Buttkus said. "We want to let people know there could be one in the area, but it's wildlife. It's to be appreciated and avoided."

There have been many sightings both confirmed and unconfirmed of cougars in all the New England states, including Massachusetts. In 1997, scat found near the remains of a killed beaver at the Quabbin Reservoir in Western Massachusetts was confirmed to be from a mountain lion, according to the Cougar Network's Web site.

In 2004, The Boston Globe reported on alleged cougar sightings in Acton.

Mountains lions in the East are mostly believed to be intentionally released animals or escapees.

Residents wanting more information can call Animal Control Officer Ed Ramos at 781 934-5774.